

District Three Governmental Cooperative POLICY ON RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES AT CONGREGATE EVENTS

District Three Governmental Cooperative supports each American's right to the free exercise of religious beliefs. Nothing in this policy is intended in any way to restrict any individual's right to meditate, pray, and worship, so long as that activity is not a violation of law and does not infringe on any other individual's rights and freedoms.

Further, District Three Governmental Cooperative recognizes that spirituality has been shown to be a positive factor in extending life span and in enhancing life quality for the elderly. Therefore it is reasonable for agency-sponsored activities to include time for inspiration, reflection and meditation so long as these activities cannot be viewed as favoring any theological perspective.

District Three Governmental Cooperative, recognizing its Constitutional obligations as a publicly-funded agency, does not endorse or support any one faith or belief system and will not tolerate the imposition of any religious practice on its participants while they are in the care of the Cooperative.

Therefore any formal religious activity, including scripture study, group prayer sessions, sermons, worship services or other similar activities that might reasonably be construed to espouse the beliefs of any sect, denomination, or theological perspective cannot be conducted within the time and space set aside for the congregate nutrition program or other group activities sponsored by the Cooperative. Such religious activities may be made available in other space on a voluntary basis to those who wish to participate, provided that such activities do not interfere with the required activities of the Cooperative's programs.

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Clarifications and Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can participants at a congregate nutrition site participate in a group Bible study?

Yes, so long as the Bible study is voluntary, takes place in an area separate from the meal or other activities of the congregate site, and does not coincide with required activities such fire drills and nutrition education programs. The Bible study (or other religious activity) must be in a different location so that those who wish to participate in it move from the congregate meeting area to the religious activity.

2. Can a clergyman be invited as a guest speaker?

It is not acceptable to invite anyone to lead a religious service as a part of the congregate site activities. All programming at congregate nutrition sites (including the invitation of outside speakers) is subject to prior approval by the Community Services Division Director. It is not necessary to get prior approval of guest authorities who give presentations on the required programming elements of health and nutrition education, public safety, and community services coordination. Also, prior approval is not required for guest talks by official representatives of the Cooperative, its Board of Commissioners, its funding sources, or its member local governments. With prior approval from the Community Services Division Director, a clergyman or any other outside speaker may be invited to speak so long as the speaker agrees not to violate any policies of the Cooperative, including the prohibitions against for-profit activities and religious services.

3. Is hymn singing allowed?

Singing is an appropriate form of entertainment and a beneficial group activity. Such activities may include the singing of traditional hymns as well as other types of music. Care should be taken to avoid limiting the singing to hymns that espouse a particular theology.

4. Can someone in the group lead devotions?

It is permissible to have brief “devotions” or meditations as a part of group activities so long as these meditations do not impose any religious practice or doctrine and do not interfere with the required activities of the group. Devotion leaders should take extreme care not to offend others. It is preferable to rotate this responsibility among willing group members and to limit the time for such activities to no more than 10 minutes. Participation must be optional.

5. Are prayer and personal witnessing allowed?

Nothing in this policy forbids a participant from praying or sharing a faith statement with one or more individuals, provided that these actions are not a formal part of the program and do not interfere with required group activities.